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Production highlights:

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

By Howard Stapleton

Santa Cruz Island, off the Southern California coast, received national attention when it was offered for sale to the Nature Conservancy. CBS did a story on its "Evening News," ABC did a two-part story on the "Good Morning America Show," NBC gave the story coverage and "People Magazine" shot there for its TV series. Most coverage was done with ENG equipment but some film was used. With the exception of the coverage for "People Magazine," all stories were relatively short and fit within a news-type format. ABC's morning show segments were approximately five minutes long. To do this, ABC's production unit spent three days on the island. The others were there only one day each.

Stapleton is staff engineer for KCET and was videotape operator on the Santa Cruz Island shoot.

Jerry Hughes was a staff director at KCET (PBS Los Angeles) when he received an assignment to direct the shooting and editing of a 30-minute documentary for the station's public affairs series, "28-Tonight." Hughes, who later became local program director at KCET, received a Los Angeles Area Emmy nomination for the assignment. Emmy nominations are based entirely on the program. The nominating committee has no information about, nor are they concerned with, the difficulties of making a program or the budget available to overcome these difficulties. And there were problems for Hughes and Price Hicks, producer.

First of all they had no budget. Then there was no choice of equipment; KCET doesn't have filmmakers. Outside production is 100% electronic and when the

Santa Cruz Island Fog bank around the island is visible as the plane moves to a higher altitude. This scene is the establishing cover shot used to open the program. (Photographs by Jerry Hughes and the author)



Santa Cruz Island

Santa Cruz Island story was produced, there was only one ENG/EFP unit.

There would be only one shooting day assigned and they had only two working days to prepare. As if that was not enough, the actual production of the program started about an hour behind schedule because of an equipment problem. That a program was completed at all, not to mention the Emmy nomination, is a credit to Hughes and his efficient, creative use of time.

Price Hicks, a multiple Emmy-winning producer in her own right, originally proposed a 30-minute documentary on Santa Cruz Island about two months before the project got under way. Her proposal was for a special program independently funded and not part of the "28-Tonight" series. That idea was killed because of a lack of funds. The program was revived and became a part of "28-Tonight" when that series developed an urgent and immediate need for material.

"28-Tonight" is a 30-minute, weekday series dealing with a variety of news and community affairs issues.

The series' host is veteran newsman and former war correspondent Clete Roberts. Roberts, a Los Angeles TV news pioneer, came out of semi-retirement to be host of the nightly series.

The program deals with investigative issues that go beyond the scope of news stories handled by the seven VHF commercial news operations in Los Angeles.

Production details

KCET's only ENG/EFP unit is assigned to "28-Tonight" five days a week; but beyond use of the equipment and the straight time hours of the crew, no budget is available for remotes. Overtime and external expenses are taboo. Fortunately, the Nature Conservancy provided air transportation to Santa Cruz Island and flying time for the aerial shots. To take advantage of that, however, it was necessary to drive 65 miles to get to the airport used by their flying service. Hughes and Hicks faced a monumental task of planning and coordinating to get the crew and equipment on the island, capture the flavor of

Santa Cruz, identify and explain the issues and return without overtime. Fortunately, the IATSE union engineers at KCET work four 10-hour days per week.

Figure three hours round trip drive time, 75 minutes for crew meal and breaks, at least 90 minutes for equipment preparation and wrap, loading and unloading the airplane, travel time around the island, and there remains about four hours shooting time with no contingency for equipment downtime.

Hicks spent the first of her two preparation days writing a tentative

The benefits of the producer's survey and extensive planning paid off

schedule, contacting guests to be interviewed on the program and securing ground transportation for them. All those interviewed were selected on their ability to provide expert information about the unique features of Santa Cruz. The island is in the Pacific Ocean at the juncture of northern and southern currents, the blending of which is responsible for unique climatic conditions. These conditions produce the diverse and unique plant life of Santa Cruz. The island is also the home of some animal sub-species found nowhere else in the world. A botanist and a biologist were scheduled for interviews to discuss these issues.

Santa Cruz provides evidence of man's presence to at least 500 B.C. Some scientists suspect man was present on Santa Cruz 30,000 years ago. There are at least 3000 archeological sites on the island. Thus, an anthropologist was obtained for another interview. And, of course, the island's owner would appear on the program. In all, six interviews were scheduled. Hicks provided Roberts with background information on the island and the guests, then left the details of the interviews up to him. They collaborated on his narration which was used as voice-over shots of the island at the open and close, and as transitions between some interviews.

Both Roberts and Hicks went to the island one day before the shooting began to learn more about the island and details of the proposed sale. While there, Hicks completed a detailed shooting schedule that noted the locations of each interview, possible areas for visual shooting and a precise timetable for the shooting day. Locations were selected on the basis of visual interest and rapid accessibility. Hicks even made an optional list of locations in the event of extra time, or if consolidation was necessary because of lack of time. Roberts studied the printed material provided by Hicks, obtained specific information from the ranch's owner, Dr. Carey Stanton, and began to write the questions he would ask each interview subject.

Stanton was offering his land to the Conservancy at a price of about one-tenth its estimated \$20 million market value. The island's unique plant and animal life consists of several species that exist nowhere else outside the Channel Islands, and some of these exist only on Santa Cruz Island. It was a legitimate news story and a good feature story.

Hughes had little to do with the production until the shooting day, and then things didn't start well.

"There was trouble with the video recorder before the engineers even left KCET," Hughes says. "Technical director/sound man Howard Stapleton detected an audio recording problem with our primary machine. I met him at the airport and by then we were over a half-hour behind schedule. He had decided to use the backup tape deck but took the questionable machine along on a cart with a color monitor so we could check our recordings."

The deck used was a portable Teac VT1000 ¾-inch cassette recorder capable of recording up to 20 minutes per reel. The camera was an RCA TK76.

All guests to be interviewed on the program were transported on one plane. The camera operator, sound man and director used a separate plane for themselves and their equipment. Channel Islands Aviation provided a 10-place Britten-Norman Islander twin engine high wing STOL (short takeoff and landing) for shooting. Mark Oberman, a pilot experienced in flying

Santa Cruz Island

camera teams, gave the crew many opportunities to cover the island at a variety of altitudes.

The lack of budget didn't allow for the rental of a camera mount in the plane, so the passenger door was taken off and had to be left behind. Gary Emrick, camera operator, sat on the floor of the plane where two rows of seats had been removed opposite the open door. All aerial shots were made hand-held with a Canon 10.5 to 105mm zoom lens on the camera.

The first recordings were made as they approached Santa Cruz but the plan called for the plane to touch down and pick up the producer, reporter and landowner before proceeding with the shooting.

Production

With all on board and airborne again, it was time to do some serious shooting. Emrick was strapped to the floor facing slightly toward the rear. It soon became apparent to Hughes that he was missing some good shots in front of the plane. Emrick's position and

safety harness restricted this forward view. According to Hughes, "I motioned for Stapleton to take the seat next to the door where I was. He rigged the recorder to start whenever the camera was turned on and we changed places. The camera, attached to a safety line inside the plane, was then passed between Stapleton and Emrick as they shot alternately front or rear."

Hughes would communicate his directions to the operators mostly with hand signals because noise from the wind and propellers made talking nearly impossible.

Roberts took the right hand seat because nearly an hour was spent shooting from the air. Three times Roberts turned to face the camera and record promos before the plane dipped down through some haze and landed in a yellow carpeted field of wild flowers on the western edge of the island. The landing site was selected by Hicks at the suggestion of Dr. Stanton, "because it was near the location of a variety of ice plant that exists nowhere else in the world. One of the interviewees is a botanist and I wanted her interview there. I also wanted to visually capture as much of the unique features of the island as possible," Stanton said.



Pre-flight From left, Dr. Carey Stanton, land owner; Price Hicks, producer; and Jerry Hughes, director, in front of the Britten-Norman Islander.

First of all, there was no budget

The other plane with the experts was also scheduled to land at this spot for the interview with the botanist. It soon became obvious that fog was closing in, and radio communication confirmed that the other plane couldn't land. The ice plant was about a mile away across an open field. Hicks was busy revising the schedule from her list of options when the pilot suggested using the twin engine Islander like a Land Rover to taxi through the flowers to a spot near the ice plant. This was done and visuals were shot there for 15 minutes. Then back to the air again for another 30 minutes of aerial camerawork before returning to the "airport" and a rendezvous with the other plane and the guests.

"I wanted as much flying footage



Aerial Shots With the producer, reporter and land owner aboard, serious shooting began. The camera, attached to a safety line, was passed between Stapleton and Emrick.



Stanton Ranch Aerial shot of the ranch complex in the "central valley" of Santa Cruz Island.

as possible," Hughes said. "The first five minutes of the documentary are beauty shots of the island with music and some narration. Most of that was from the air but once we established pictures from the ground I didn't return to the aerials until the close."

On the ground, four interviews and as much visual material as possible were recorded in 90 minutes. Traveling was on dirt roads

that sometimes restricted speeds to 5 mph. The camera crew rode with their equipment in the back of a pickup truck that was provided by the ranch. Locations for interviews were selected so that visual inserts could be made with a minimum of camera and equipment relocation. At each site, Emrick immediately began shooting visuals while Stapleton put Sony ECM50 microphones on the guests and attached Roberts'

mic to the mixer. In this way, precious minutes were used to record as much visual material as possible. After each interview, additional video and natural audio were recorded.

The first interview was with Henry Duffield, ranch foreman. "I wanted a location which would illustrate the fact that this is a working cattle ranch," Hughes said. "Halfway between the airport and

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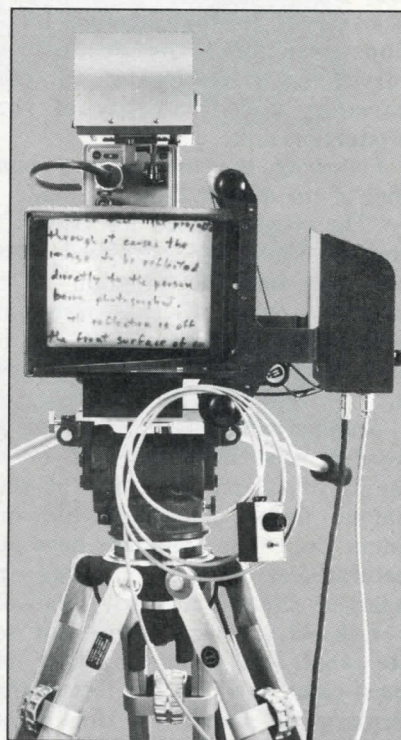
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Camera set-up Hughes and Emrick set a shot with the RCA TK-76.



Cut aways Emrick shoots visuals as Stapleton records natural sound. Audio equipment was kept to a minimum. ECM 50s were used for most interviews and Electro-Voice RE 50 was used as a hand-held mic and for ambient sound.

Santa Cruz Island

the house—about two miles—we found just the spot. There was a broad meadow with several cows near the road, and lush, rolling hills in the background.”

Duffield, a polio victim, performs most of his duties from behind the wheel of a Jeep. The interview was done with Roberts standing next to the Jeep, Duffield in the seat and the cows in the background. The fact that Hughes could make adjustments in the shooting locations even after the producer's survey is a testimony to the harmony and flexibility of the production unit.

Following the interview, a pan shot of the distant hills was made.

“The program cried for visuals,” Hughes said. “We dropped that pan shot into the program as a transition while Clete's narration bridged two other situations and it only cost about 30 seconds to get it.”

Another setup was made in a wooded area near the den of a family of Island Fox, one of the unique forms of animal life on Santa Cruz. These animals have no natural fear of man and, as an interview site was selected, a pair of 6-week-old kit foxes came out to see what was going on. One of them came to within five feet of the camera as some of the most exciting shots of the documentary were made. Meanwhile, the mother

fox came out and calmly watched from a log 20 yards away. An interview was done as the foxes played nearby; then by moving only the camera, tripod and cables, the interview with the botanist was done in a grove of trees across the road.

The benefits of the producer's survey and extensive planning paid off in terms of less crew time on the island and lower overall cost. A production unit unfamiliar with the island or unaccustomed to working

Santa Cruz was a legitimate news story and a good feature

together as a team would have had difficulty meeting this assignment successfully.

Two hours before the end of the crew's day, the major interview of the program was still unrecorded, the sun was going down fast and all battery power for the camera had been used. If they could continue at all, overtime seemed inevitable. It was decided to interview Stanton beside the swimming pool near his house—a spot where power from a diesel generator could be provided. Meanwhile, the best camera battery belt was placed on fast charge.

Upon completion of the Stanton interview, one final guest waited to be seen on camera. Hicks made the only decision possible: “Go for it.” Albert Spaulding, Ph.D., an anthropologist from the University of California, Santa Barbara, was placed near a garden at the edge of the pool where the equipment could remain on ranch power. As the interview started, all the other guests were sent to their plane for the return trip home.

Following the Spaulding interview, Hughes wanted still more visual material, so while Stapleton wrapped the equipment, Emrick shot hand-held visuals of the ranch complex until the partially recharged camera battery died again. Everyone then jumped into trucks for a dash to the plane and their flight to the mainland. At the airport, they found the aircraft tied down, and the pilot on the radio-phone.

Fog had closed in. The first plane got to the mainland just in time but Oberman wasn't going to take off. Instrument Flight Rules were in effect. His plane had all the necessary instruments and enough fuel for a straight across visual flight but not enough fuel to legally make an instrument landing. Stanton was to have seven unexpected house guests that night. Everyone returned to the ranch house, the equipment was secured in a barn,

batteries were put on charge and the crew was off the clock without overtime.

First light brought another day, the crew would soon be on company time again and Hughes was determined to make the most of it. There had been no visual material that directly related to the Spaulding interview, but there was a 2000-year-old Indian village site where he had done extensive digging. It was about 30 minutes away. Following a hearty ranch-style breakfast, the team was on the road again. Two reels of tape remained unused and most of that was shot at the village and an adjacent beach area. More shots of the pristine beauty of Santa Cruz Island were made on the return to the ranch. A shot of the American flag flying over the ranch complex was being made as tape ran out.

A fondness for the isolation of this island was growing in the crew. They had hopes of the coast remaining socked in for some time as the ranch staff prepared lunch. They were quickly brought back to reality when Oberman reported im-

proving weather on the mainland. At Hicks' urging they left quickly while there was a chance.

An hour and a half later Hughes was in his car heading toward the studio where he was assigned to direct a "talking head" show. The engineers were driving toward Pasadena for another assignment. The overnight delay had fouled up the local production schedule and they still had four more hours to work. But there had been no overtime and on this night they wouldn't be delayed by fog.

Post-production

Editing started a week later using KCET's CMX system 300. All cassette masters were transferred to 2-inch videotape for the procedure. Dan Mossbarger, editor, was at the helm while Hughes and Hicks personally presided over the session that was completed in less than two working days.

"Our shooting ratio was less than eight to one," Hughes said. "Much of the unused footage was from the air. We made several passes around the ranch complex and other im-

portant areas but had to throw out a lot of it. It was just too unstable whenever we went in on a long lens. It was virtually impossible to get any detail shots from the air. The best stuff was full wide, while flying low just off shore. By holding the camera steady and letting the plane provide all the motion we were able to get good views of the landscape. A good camera mount would have saved flying time and given us better shots but we just couldn't afford it."

"The program cost less than \$200 above the line," Hicks said. "All of that was for surface transportation to and from the airport and lunch for the guests and staff on Santa Cruz."

The program was replayed twice on KCET after its regular "28-Tonight" schedule: once as a special weekend rerun and once again a few weeks later as it played statewide through California's "Capitol News Bureau." It was also offered to other regional non-commercial interconnections and played on many other stations throughout the country. □

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